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FEBRUARY 10, 2005

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UNITED STATES IS KEY PROVIDER OF FOOD AID FOR WORLD'S POOR

Ambassador Tony Hall calls for action to fight hunger around the world

By Daniel Cain
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- The United States is the major player in feeding the world's poor through bilateral, private, and especially multilateral food distribution programs around the globe, according to Tony P. Hall, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization.

Hall, who is known for his long commitment to alleviating poverty around the world, highlighted the scope of U.S. humanitarian efforts at the American University School of International Service February 7, noting that the United States supplies more than half the aid being distributed by United Nations organizations.

"If you put it all together -- what we give U.N. organizations, our bilateral help, what we give as individuals, through churches and temples, through remittances -- it's incredible. It's something like \$56 billion a year," Hall said.

Despite all this aid, he said, "we are still only [feeding] about 20 percent of the people in the world today that are hungry. We have a long way to go."

In calling for an even greater effort to assist the poor, Hall described the deplorable conditions facing many of the world's poorest populations. He estimated that

25,000 people a day die from hunger and millions of people earn less than \$2 a day.

Hall, a former Ohio congressman who founded the Select Committee on Hunger in the U.S. House of Representatives, said he was appalled by the humanitarian crisis taking place in Darfur, which he recently visited to supervise the distribution of emergency supplies.

"Darfur has about 140 [refugee] camps. I've never known of a country that had that many camps," Hall said. "Horrendous things go on there," he said, describing the murders and rapes being endured by men and women of certain African tribes across Darfur.

He stressed, however, that large amounts of food are being delivered, overwhelmingly from the United States, and many lives are being saved, "but it's a very difficult place to work in."

Hall also highlighted the devastating effects of poverty and internal conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, "a country that will break your heart. It's incredible -- I've never seen individuals that have had so many human rights [violations] committed against them," he said.

Many of the combatants fighting in the Congo are children, he said, estimating that "child soldiers," between 12 and 15 years old, constitute more than half of the combatants in the country.

Speaking from the audience, Tim Lavelle of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) estimated that more than 3 million people have died in the Congo in the past five years. "The number of deaths due to conflict and violence exceeds just about any other place on earth," Lavelle said.

Both Hall and Lavelle lamented the situation in the Congo and expressed doubt that the country could endure much longer in its current circumstances. "The country is still fighting for its life. I don't know whether they are going to make it," Hall said.

Hall also cited President Bush's recent announcements regarding increased funding for HIV/AIDS in the context that proper nutrition, as well as medicine, is essential for saving those afflicted by the disease.

Hall spoke passionately about the issue of genetically enhanced food and the promise such food holds for feeding

hungry people worldwide. Although he acknowledged the political sensitivity of the issue, he termed the use of -- or, more specifically, the failure to use -- genetically modified foods a "moral issue."

He explained that, while Americans eat biotech food every day that is perfectly safe, it is wrong for the leaders in some countries in Africa, such as Zambia and Zimbabwe, to have obstructed genetically enhanced food aid from entering their countries.

"Anybody who keeps legitimate, good food from hungry people ... ought to be tried for crimes against humanity," Hall said.

RICE SAYS NATO MEMBERS IN CLEAR AGREEMENT ON ALLIANCE AGENDA

Iraqi elections remind many in NATO of their own struggles for freedom

Washington -- Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice says the United States and its European allies in NATO are in agreement on the issues before them and will be taking practical steps to advance the alliance's agenda.

Following an informal working lunch for NATO foreign ministers in Brussels, Belgium, February 9, Rice emphasized the unity within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization during discussions on matters from the Middle East to the Balkans.

The secretary said she reported to the ministers on her meetings earlier in the week with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, and that the NATO countries pledged to support the efforts of both leaders toward peace.

On Iraq, Rice said, it was "the best discussion ... that we have had as an alliance since the Saddam Hussein regime fell." This was due in part, she said, to the desire for freedom shown by the number of Iraqis who voted in their recent elections despite intimidation. This action "was reminiscent for this alliance of what many around that table had gone through" to secure their own liberty, she explained.

Topics of discussion at the ministerial luncheon included “new contributions to support the evolution of Iraq, and particularly to support its security forces and their training,” Rice said, reporting that “a number of countries immediately agreed to contribute.”

In response to a question on Iran’s suspected pursuit of a nuclear weapons program, the secretary urged that country to “take the opportunity the Europeans are giving them to live up to their obligations [under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty].” Great Britain, Germany and France are attempting to persuade Iran to renounce nuclear weapons.

“I believe that everybody is telling the Iranians that they are going to have to live up to their international obligations or next steps are in the offing,” Rice said, adding that “the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency] statutes would suggest that Iran has to be referred to the U.N. Security Council” where sanctions could be imposed.

She also said there are concerns about “Iran’s continued support of rejectionist groups in the Palestinian territories when we are all working toward a peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis.”

However, Rice said she believed that a diplomatic solution was possible if Iran understands “the international community is quite serious about it living up to its obligations.”

Among other issues discussed were U.S. concerns over the possibility the European Union may do away with its embargo on selling arms to China. Rice said talks on that matter with European colleagues were “fruitful.”

“I do feel that we are being listened to,” she said.

See State Department transcript of Rice’s remarks.

BUSH SEEKS ADDITIONAL \$600 MILLION FOR TSUNAMI RELIEF

Aid to fund infrastructure projects, early warning systems

By Stephen Kaufman

Washington File White House Correspondent

Washington -- President Bush has announced that he is seeking \$950 million as part of a supplemental appropriations request to the U.S. Congress to support areas hit by the Indian Ocean tsunami and to reimburse the cost of relief efforts in them to date.

The \$950 million figure includes the \$350 million U.S. commitment made in January, plus an additional \$600 million request.

In a statement released February 9, Bush said “We will use these resources to provide assistance and to work with the affected nations on rebuilding vital infrastructure that re-energizes economies and strengthens societies.”

The tsunami and its resulting devastation have taken an estimated 150,000 lives in south and southeast Asia.

Speaking in Washington February 9, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Administrator Andrew Natsios described the president’s proposal as “the most generous and the most extensive in American history for the U.S. government.”

As much as \$339 million of the total funds would be used for large-scale infrastructure projects, such as the reconstruction of highways in Indonesia.

“Many of the interior bridges within [the Indonesian province of] Aceh were completely destroyed by the earthquake before the tsunami arrived and many of the roads were damaged,” Natsios said, and in order to have reconstruction, road systems will first have to be repaired.

The president is also seeking \$168 million worth of smaller scale infrastructure projects such as building schools, health clinics, and water distribution systems, Natsios said, as well as helping people living in shelters and temporary camps to move into permanent housing and establishing livelihood programs to help them generate revenues.

The USAID administrator also said the Bush administration is seeking \$62 million to fund technical assistance for capacity building to governments “so they have the infrastructure, the management information systems and the other planning tools necessary to make sure that this is all done in a coordinated way.”

Lastly, Natsios said \$35 million of the funding would be used to create early warning systems, which would also warn of other natural disasters, such as typhoons, which have been deadly to the region in the past 30 years, he said.

Natsios said the initial emergency food aid in the wake of the disaster quickly transitioned into rehabilitation aid, such as microfinance loans, job creation, health care, and sanitation aid.

The Bush administration has also given grants to try to avoid human trafficking from occurring in the wake of the tsunami disaster, as well as assistance to those dealing with emotional trauma, he said.

Of the \$950 million, approximately \$346 million will be used to reimburse USAID and the U.S. military for their relief efforts since the disaster. Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz said nearly 16,000 U.S. personnel were deployed, along with 26 ships, 58 helicopters and 43 fixed-wing aircrafts.

He said the Defense Department delivered over 10 million pounds of food and supplies and provided more than 400,000 gallons of fresh water to the survivors. U.S. military health specialists have also treated almost 2,500 patients, he said.

See February 9 White House fact sheet on U.S. support for tsunami relief.

UNITED STATES WELCOMES ARAB GOVERNANCE REFORM INITIATIVES

Jordanian conference highlights governance-development link

The United States applauds government reform efforts embraced by representatives from 16 Arab countries at the “Good Governance for Development in the Arab Countries” conference on the Dead Sea coast of Jordan February 6 and 7.

Under Secretary of the Treasury John Taylor told the delegates that good governance is inextricably linked with economic growth. He said that in his job at the Treasury Department he often deals with businessmen who are frustrated by their dealings with foreign governments.

“They are frustrated because they want to invest, but are driven away by what they perceive as rampant corruption or excessive bureaucracy,” he said. Government reforms, he said, can generate greater foreign and domestic investment, thereby creating more jobs.

Taylor said that government transparency also ensures more efficient use of public resources and foreign aid funds.

The under secretary urged the delegates to establish measurable criteria for government reform in order to ensure the effectiveness of their initiatives.

“An environment where public servants are working toward specific and publicly disseminated targets will lead to better governance,” he said. “Quite simply, what gets measured gets done.”

Jordan hosted the Good Governance for Development conference in cooperation with the U.N. Development Program (UNDP) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

UGANDA SEES BEST CHANCE FOR PEACE IN 18 YEARS

Confidence-building measures are having settling effect, NGO official says

By Matthew Pritchard
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- Northern Uganda, which has been torn by decades of fighting between the Ugandan government and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), has perhaps its best chance for peace in the last 18 years, says the special advisor to the president of the International Crisis Group (ICG), a nongovernmental organization.

John Prendergast, a former advisor on African issues at the National Security Council, said confidence-building measures such as cease-fire negotiations, the reduction in LRA support from the Sudanese government, and a more effective Ugandan Army are beginning to have a settling effect on the region. He was speaking February 7 at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington.

Uganda has had an ongoing civil war for 18 years and as many as 1.4 million people have been displaced in northern Uganda, according to the State Department. The LRA is held responsible for the violence and for the abduction of children from towns in the north to serve both as soldiers and as sex slaves.

In August 2004 President Bush signed the Northern Uganda Crisis Response Act, which calls for a congressional report in February 2005 detailing the causes of conflict and the sources of support for the LRA. The United States has also provided more than \$13 million to support the reintegration of former child soldiers and other formerly abducted persons and to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Additionally, the United States provided nearly \$4 million in emergency non-food humanitarian assistance for FY 2003, and almost \$9 million in such assistance for FY 2004. It also gave \$62 million to World Food Program efforts in Uganda, more than 50 percent of total assistance to the country, primarily for a massive feeding program for refugees in northern and eastern Uganda.

The primary obstacle to a realistic peace settlement is the leader of the LRA, Joseph Kony. Recent interviews by Prendergast with LRA commanders in Uganda who have come out of hiding paint a "bizarre portrait of a man

rooted in a grotesquely distorted view of the Old Testament," he said.

Kony believes he is led by God to destroy anyone who collaborates with the Ugandan army, Prendergast said. "He likens himself to Moses ... and like Moses he doesn't believe he'll make it to the Promised Land, which provides a very dangerous ambiguity to whether he will ever let himself personally be part of the peace process."

Meanwhile, the LRA is in "survival mode" because of cuts in its supply lines from Sudan, Prendergast said. Its members are stealing food and stealing children to make up for those who have been killed in battle. However, the LRA has "a long track record of bouncing back," he said.

"If Kony were to be killed or captured, the LRA would unravel," Prendergast said. But to ensure there is not another uprising, other strategies besides military action, such as aid and humanitarian assistance, are key, he said.

Prendergast suggested that one way to encourage members of the LRA to put down their guns would be through the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration program. The Ugandan government and the World Bank have not yet implemented this program, but must do so soon to further the peace process, he said.

Pleases Note: Most texts and transcript mentioned in the U.S. Mission Daily Bulletin are available via our homepage: www.usmission.ch

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